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BALTIMORE SUN

21 October 1984

# CIA: objectivity vs. politics

## Aide expands on why he quit

By Stephen E. Nordlinger  
Sun Staff Correspondent

HOLLYWOOD, Md. — John R. Horton, who resigned from the CIA as senior Latin American analyst in protest after Director William J. Casey ordered changes in an intelligence report on Mexico, says the agency "pays a price" when its boss lets ideology interfere with its objectivity.

The changes resulted in a report that conformed with the administration's Central America policy, but that offered a gloomier picture of Mexico's political and economic climate than Mr. Horton and other intelligence analysts thought the facts warranted, he said.

The Casey view reflected a "strong ideological leaning" within the administration that "Mexico is next" if the administration fails to stop the "Marxists-Leninists in Nicaragua and El Salvador," according to Mr. Horton.

Mr. Horton warned that such a politically motivated change in some future intelligence estimate might lead to "something really serious" by misleading the president.

The controversy, said Mr. Horton, illustrates the CIA's potential vulnerability to political influence by a director who is also involved in high-level policy-making, especially on a sensitive issue such as Central America.

"The director should be protecting the integrity of the agency," said Mr. Horton. "Casey probably thinks he is. I don't think he gets up in the morning and says, 'I'm going to go over there and politicize the agency.' And in fact, he has done some good" in rebuilding the CIA and its funding.

But, he said, the agency "pays a price" in having a policy-making director who impinges on the long-held objectivity and independence of the agency by redrafting a major intelligence estimate.

Mr. Horton, a courtly 64-year-old Midwesterner and a former veteran CIA operations officer, spoke about the ordeal in a two-hour interview, his first extended discussion of his resignation in May since it became public three weeks ago.

Wearing a plaid shirt and corduroys, he sat at a wooden bench on the deck of a modern house he built himself a few years ago on a bluff overlooking the Patuxent River. Bernstein's "Mass" played on a radio inside the house. An American flag fluttered in the mild breeze. An osprey he identified glided overhead.

Mr. Horton kept his resignation from the CIA quiet through the summer as he tended his vineyard and swam and sailed in the Patuxent at his St. Marys home. But it became public after he discussed the experience in a speech to the World Affairs Council in Portland, Maine. A son and his wife live there and invited him to speak on the subject.

His off-the-record speech, in which he discussed his experience over almost a year as top Latin American analyst, was submitted to the CIA for clearance as required by law, but it was not censored.

Mr. Horton said that before ordering the changes in the intelligence report, Mr. Casey lobbied strenuously among the government's intelligence officials in an effort to win their support for a report on Mexico that would conform to administration policy. He "leaned on us to come out with a gloomier assessment" of the economic and political situation in Mexico than the material gathered by the government's intelligence community justified, Mr. Horton said.

Mr. Horton was chairman of the National Intelligence Council, composed of intelligence experts from the CIA, the State and Defense departments and other agencies, during the months-long drafting of the Mexico report.

Mr. Casey decided to change the report after he was unsuccessful in persuading these intelligence analysts and a higher-level board of top experts to adopt his viewpoint.

Eventually, the members of this higher-level board, in a final review of the report, agreed to accept the changed version, Mr. Horton said, rather than continue to collide with Mr. Casey, who is an influential figure at the White House. The report remains classified.

Mr. Casey, who was the Reagan campaign manager in 1980, was not available for an interview, the CIA said. An agency spokeswoman, Patti Volz, said "an intelligence estimate is a difficult subject requiring give and take among analysts, and you are going to have disagreements." In the end, she said, the intelligence estimate is the director's responsibility to determine.

Ms. Volz said there had been "considerable rewriting," but she said she would "not get into the question" of whether Mr. Casey was alone in advocating the controversial passages.

Mr. Horton, in the interview, spoke highly of some of the CIA's former directors, including Richard Helms and George Bush, and stated, "I don't have a quarrel with the CIA." He called himself "fairly conservative" and expressed support for Reagan administration objectives in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

"The real reason for resigning was not to seek martyrdom or make a big splash, but simply to say this isn't proper," he said. "Mr. Casey really shouldn't do this, and you can't just get me to nod and say, 'OK, you changed it and that was your prerogative.' It is his prerogative, but I think it was wrong."

Ironically, it was Mr. Casey who had invited Mr. Horton early last year to come out of retirement to be the agency's chief Latin American analyst. Mr. Horton had been with the CIA from 1948 to 1975 in the Far East, Central America and Washington.

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"Casey has strong feelings about how the world looks," said Mr. Horton. "That's what happened in Mexico. He felt, 'This is the way I want this estimate to read on Mexico because here is the way it is,' and the fact a lot of us didn't agree with him didn't deter him."

The Casey view, Mr. Horton said, stemmed from a "a strong ideological push" toward finding a widespread Soviet peril in Central America as well as a desire by Mr. Casey in the role of administration policy adviser to have the estimate framed in such a way that it could be used to justify whatever policy the White House pursued.

Administration relations with Mexico have been strained because of Mexico's friendly attitude toward Cuba and Nicaragua and because of U.S. officials' belief that Mexico had adopted domestic policies that allowed a debt crisis to develop two years ago. Mr. Casey apparently wanted a tough intelligence report as a basis for applying pressure on Mexico to support U.S. policies in Central America.

But since a meeting between President Reagan and President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado in May, the month Mr. Horton left the CIA, the administration has noted a somewhat more accommodating attitude by Mexico.

Mr. Horton said that Mr. Casey "did not like the estimate all along the way, and he put a fair amount of pressure on us to include things that we didn't think were justified."

After the board of top intelligence officers met and kept the basic report as written by intelligence experts, including Mr. Horton, Mr. Casey "had someone rewrite some of the key parts of the estimate," said Mr. Horton.

"That was what I objected to," he said. "The estimate itself probably doesn't matter a great deal as to what was said or wasn't said. But it was the process I objected to, the pressure I objected to."

Mr. Casey "had someone call all the members of the [intelligence] board ahead of time and say that at this meeting [to review the report] he wanted to get people to state what they thought the odds were for a complete collapse of Mexico."

"In the voting around the table, by and large people didn't think the odds were great for a complete collapse," said Mr. Horton. But Mr. Casey concluded nevertheless that the report did not reflect "the need for alertness and vigilance on the government's part."

"I thought we pretty well covered the possibilities when we said we needed watching very carefully, but he wanted the estimate redone, which resulted in having it closer to what he wanted in the first place. The final language, I felt, was a bow to bias."

While faulting Mr. Casey for re-drafting the report, Mr. Horton said that "Casey is not the cause of our problems." The basic problem, Mr. Horton said, is the "inherent tension" between politicians who bring pressure to get CIA support for a controversial policy and the agency, which should remain detached.



John Horton, who quit as CIA's Latin analyst, at home in St. Marys.

THE SUN/LLOYD PEARSON